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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [AF](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: NOVEMBER 30 MEETING BETWEEN U.S. CENTCOM COMMANDER
PETRAEUS AND OMANI FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: MUSCAT 797

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

¶1. (C) On November 30, General David Petraeus, U.S. CENTCOM Commander, and the Ambassador met over dinner with Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi. Bin Alawi was joined by Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secretary General Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi, as well as Mohammed al-Hassan, Political Affairs Director for the Minister. During the dinner, General Petraeus and bin Alawi addressed regional security issues with specific discussions on Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Syria. End Summary.

U.S.-GCC Security Dialogue

¶2. (C) General Petraeus commended bin Alawi for promoting a GCC-U.S. dialogue on security matters (reftel). Bin Alawi stated that such a joint dialogue had been not been seriously attempted in the past because of differing views within the GCC regarding security issues and, he alleged, U.S. State Department preference for confining security discussions to bilateral levels.

Iraq

¶3. (C) Bin Alawi claimed that he had once proposed a plan for Iraq's armed forces, which were "not loyal to anyone," based on strategy employed by Sultan Qaboos to successfully unite tribal groups within Oman's military. In response, General Petraeus outlined efforts overseen by Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki to improve and make Iraqi forces more representative of the country as a whole, as well as to overhaul the Iraqi national police. Bin Alawi commented that Maliki currently appeared "more suitable" than anyone else for the position of prime minister.

¶4. (C) Recalling Maliki's visit to Muscat in May 2007, bin Alawi said he had advised Maliki to look beyond his own interests in serving as the leader of "all Iraqis." He had further encouraged Maliki to regularly use the media and other channels to "talk more to the people" in order to show that he was above sectarian and tribal divisions. Engaging the "new generation" of young people in Iraq and communicating a positive vision of the future to them, bin Alawi stated, is key in helping to stabilize the country.

Iran

¶5. (C) After a quick briefing by General Petraeus on Iranian support of violence in Iraq and Tehran's interference in internal Iraqi affairs, bin Alawi opined that Iraq would "never be a satellite of Iran." He stated he had told a succession of Iranian leaders, Tehran must develop good relations with, and be a "serious partner" of, the international community -- rather than "talk about revolutions" -- if it hoped to play an influential role in the region. Agreeing that Iran's provision of arms to Iraqi militias was "dangerous," bin Alawi claimed that Iran recognized the risks it faced as a result of its actions in Iraq, but that "psychological problems" had prevented it so far from altering course.

¶6. (C) Bin Alawi asserted that Iran had no designs on GCC states as it knew the Gulf countries were firmly aligned with and under the protective umbrella of the West. What the regime in Tehran truly wanted was recognition from Western powers of its "legitimacy." If the U.S. were to give "clear cut recognition" that the regime in Tehran was the legitimate government of Iran, Iran would likely change its policies, he asserted. The current "stick and carrot approach" employed by the West towards Iran did not give Tehran the respect it craved and was thus unsuccessful.

¶7. (C) Addressing current P5 1 talks with Iran, bin Alawi said that Iran was all too aware of differences of opinion between P5 1 members. Tehran knew, for example, that the EU's Javier Solana didn't necessarily speak for the Russian

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government. Iranian leaders had told him, however, that the Supreme Leader (i.e., Ali Khamenei) said he was willing to make a "sacrifice" if presented with a creative idea, rather than the current P5 1 offer calling for the suspension of Iran's nuclear enrichment activities. Bin Alawi said that the West's current policy towards Iran carried a "very big risk," and he accordingly recommended consideration of a "new path" that might include international "control" of the enrichment process.

¶8. (C) General Petraeus and bin Alawi both noted the ties between the Iranian community in the U.S. and Iranians in Iran. They further agreed on the importance of exposing the Iranian population to "outside" ideas and views. Bin Alawi was firm, however, in stating that the Iranian people would "follow their leaders wherever they go." He mused that this probably had "something to do with the Shi'a religion."

Afghanistan

¶9. (C) Bin Alawi asserted that Pakistan had much "economic potential," but was unable to prosper in an environment of conflict. Afghanistan, on the other hand, had historically been a land a bandits and warlords. He said that drug production was the main source of wealth in Afghanistan and had to be addressed. The question was how? He agreed with General Petraeus that a viable crop substitution program was one option, but that this would require a network of roads for transportation. "First grade the roads, and then cover them with asphalt later," bin Alawi advised.

¶10. (C) Apart from the drug trade, bin Alawi stated it was imperative to "change the thinking" of the Afghan people away from using violence and towards a peaceful vision that they could "buy into." This would greatly aid in putting Taliban "recruiters" out of business. One way of achieving this goal, he continued, was to engage Afghans in the political process with the help of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and other such bodies. By widely involving the Afghan population in town-hall meetings and other discussion fora, the government could get Afghans to break out of their own "narrow views" and concentrate on a better

future. To further promote change in Afghanistan, bin Alawi advocated not focusing exclusively on the military campaign but also on spending more funds to provide educational and economic opportunities to Afghans. This approach was employed successfully by Sultan Qaboos during the communist-backed Dhofar rebellion in the early 1970s in presenting an attractive alternative to continued fighting.

Syria

¶11. (C) Turning to the Levant, bin Alawi said he was hopeful that Lebanese Hizballah would turn itself into a full-fledged political party. Progress on Israel-Syria peace talks would greatly aid this transformation. Bin Alawi claimed that the Syrian government, and President Bashar al-Assad in particular, realized that the regime in Damascus could not continue indefinitely if it did not "open up" the country to development and change.

¶12. (S/NF) General Petraeus made clear that if Syria sought to be included in discussions with the U.S. and Europe, as well as with leading Arab countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, on regional issues, it had to immediately stop allowing suicide bombers and other foreign fighters to transit into Iraq and refrain from harboring those calling for the violent overthrow of the Iraqi government. When bin Alawi attempted to advocate for engagement with Syria in the context of its historic culture as a nation of "traders," General Petraeus forcefully explained recent multi-faceted communications through interlocutors with the Syrian government urging it to take action against specific threats to Iraq and how Syria, in response, had done nothing. Similarly, when bin Alawi stated that Syria wanted "senior U.S. attention" before reconsidering its policies, General Petraeus reminded the minister of the visit of U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi to Damascus in April 2007, which resulted in no appreciable change in Syrian behavior.

¶13. (C) Bin Alawi stated that he still believed that al-Assad was ready to alter course, but added that he would

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take what General Petraeus said into account in preparing for the next time he talked with the Syrians. He also remarked that he had not planned on traveling to Damascus but that now, with the approval of the Sultan, would consider such a trip.

Piracy

¶14. (C) Asked for his views on piracy off the coasts of Yemen and Somalia, General Petraeus explained the challenges involved and the steps being taken to reduce acts of piracy. He then described additional steps vessels need to take to ward off or foil pirate attacks (e.g., speed up, take evasive action, and pull up the ladder). Bin Alawi noted Omani concern over the issue as well as support for International Maritime Organization (IMO) discussions on the piracy issue. He declined, however, to state what Oman could lend to efforts to combat the pirates.

¶15. (U) This message has been cleared by General Petraeus.
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